

# Exhibit I



## NEWS

# Jail detainees say their lives at stake



by Elizabeth Weill-Greenberg March 13, 2023



**With a special election for Clayton County sheriff coming up next week, people detained at the county's scandal-plagued jail are speaking out about horrific conditions.**

*This story was originally published by The Appeal.*

by Elizabeth Weill-Greenberg  
theappeal.org

Just over a week away from [a closely watched sheriff's election](#), people detained at Georgia's [Clayton County Jail](#) say they are made to live in squalor and denied the most basic necessities under the facility's current leadership.

Over the past month, in video and phone calls with The Appeal, along with one handwritten letter, six detainees described dangerous and inhumane conditions at the jail. Dozens of men share a few working toilets. The showers are cold. Men say they receive a clean jumpsuit only about once a month, even as some battle a bedbug infestation. The jail is crowded and understaffed. Detainees are forced to sleep on the floor.

"COs are actually working 16 hours every day because they don't have enough to staff the jail," said Caleb, a detainee at the jail. "They're literally sleepwalking."

The Appeal is using aliases for all incarcerated sources out of concern for their safety.

Caleb says that apart from trips to medical appointments, he hasn't been outside since he arrived at Clayton County Jail in 2019, more than three years and a global pandemic ago. He is among the [more than 75 percent of detainees](#) being held at the jail pretrial, meaning they are legally presumed innocent.

Jeff has been at the jail since October. Bedbugs feast on him at night, he said, but the guards won't give him a new uniform. His underwear was confiscated when he arrived, and he just recently received his first pair—a hand-me-down from another detainee.

The doors to their cells don't lock, said Peter, who has been in and out of the jail over the last year. He fears being attacked in the middle of the night, and says he's seen it happen to others. Last fall, he was shanked for a T-shirt, he said. He showed the scar during a video call.

This month, Clayton County voters are [casting their ballots in a special election](#) for sheriff, the results of which could directly impact the lives of the [more than 1,700 people](#) held inside the jail.

Last year, former Sheriff Victor Hill was [convicted](#) of violating the [constitutional rights of detainees](#), including a [high school student with mental illness](#), when he ordered his employees to strap them in restraint chairs for hours at a time. His sentencing hearing is [scheduled](#) to take place on Tuesday. His [godson](#), Levon Allen, was [sworn in](#) as interim sheriff in December and is running against four challengers to serve a full term. This is the first election for sheriff in [more than a decade](#) without Hill's name on the ballot. The sheriff's office did not respond to multiple requests for comment about the claims made by detainees.

To correct the jail's [rampant human rights abuses](#), the jail needs new leadership and external oversight, said Caleb.

"We need somebody to come in here and see about this," he said. "The Department of Justice, somebody needs to come."

Cruelty has long been the norm at Clayton County Jail. When Caleb arrived there in 2019, Hill was still the sheriff. Guards routinely beat detainees, he said.

"You had to face the wall [and] if someone was caught not facing the wall, they were getting jumped on," Caleb said. "It was just that simple."

## Upcoming Events

- 11** Morrow City Council Work Session
- 17** Lovejoy City Council
- 18** Morrow Planning & Zoning Board
- 20** DPCC Monthly Meeting
- 8** Morrow City Council Work Session
- 15** Morrow Planning & Zoning Board
- 17** DPCC Monthly Meeting
- 21** Lovejoy City Council

[View Calendar](#)

## DONATE



## LATEST

FPPD offers citizens police academy

July 5, 2023

Docs show CCSO, Riverdale PD background check deal

July 5, 2023

Franklin declares for BOC chair

July 5, 2023

CCSO seeks another \$3.7M in jail repairs at Wed. BOC meeting

July 5, 2023

GBI investigating Antoine shooting

July 5, 2023


 Search

Even after Hill's departure, violence remains a pervasive problem. David, who arrived at the jail in January, said other detainees have jumped him several times "because I refused to pay them anything."

At the end of February, Caleb said he witnessed a guard slap a detainee and slam him to the floor before throwing him in the unit.

"Hour or so later, the guy come out stabbed up," he said.

The dehumanizing treatment begins when people arrive at the jail. Guards often confiscate their underwear, but provide them with only a jumpsuit, according to detainees. If they want socks, underwear, or a T-shirt, they must purchase them from the commissary, which charges \$1.72 for a pair of socks, \$4.50 for a pair of boxer shorts, and \$4.50 for a T-shirt, according to the [commissary sheet](#). If they can't afford it, they have to go without, according to the detained men who spoke with The Appeal.

They have to wear the same jumpsuit for weeks at a time, said Caleb.

"Right now as I speak, they're passing out some suits," he said during a call. "This is the first time we've had a clean uniform in a month."

When Peter spoke with The Appeal in February, he said he had worn the same uniform since he arrived at the jail, more than two weeks earlier. He said he had to barter with other detainees for a blanket and sheet.

"We got bedbugs real bad," he said. "I mean bedbugs off the chain, and they're not letting people change their uniforms."

When Jeff spoke with The Appeal, he said he had just been treated for bedbugs and lice, but hadn't received a new uniform.

"I get eat up at night," he said. "They been feeding on me at night. I can't even sleep."

On the women's side, two female detainees told The Appeal that their uniforms are changed only a few times a month, at most.

When women arrive at the jail, they're strip-searched, and their bras and underwear are confiscated, according to Jane, who's been at the jail since last year. If they want undergarments, they have to buy them from the commissary. Women's underwear costs just over \$3, and a bra costs nearly \$9, according to the commissary sheet. Women who are menstruating and cannot afford underwear have had sanitary napkins fall out of their pants or have bled through their uniforms, she said.

"It makes us feel like less of a person because it's like some dogs and cats and other animals are treated better than we are," Jane said. "And we're humans and they overlook us, treat us bad, and they just go on about their business and they don't care."

## "Guys go to bed hungry in here every night."

—Caleb, a detainee in the Clayton County Jail

Incarcerated sources reported serious plumbing issues at the jail that create a foul and unsanitary environment. They say the dorms frequently flood and there are few working toilets. Their showers are cold.

"Parts of the facility smell awful, like pure shit and urine," Judy, who's been at the jail for more than three years, wrote in a letter to The Appeal. "Sometimes we are forced to eat in cells with feces floating in toilets."

In her cell, she said, the toilet was broken for five to six months. She and her cellmate, she wrote, had to carry buckets of water up flights of stairs to flush the toilet.

David said they have to urinate and defecate in bags because of the lack of working toilets. Caleb said there are 48 men in his unit—three men to each two-person cell—who have to share one working shower and three working toilets.

"We have to fill the [mop] bucket up in the shower, carry to whatever room you're in, to flush the toilet," said Caleb. "Some rooms don't have running water at all."

Peter reported that there are only two working toilets for the 37 people in his unit.

"People have to trade food items just to come use somebody's bathroom," Peter said.

There's standing sewage water on the floor of his unit, he said.

Guards "open the door [and say], 'Oh my God, it smells in here,'" he recalled. "We're living in here. We're eating in here."

In addition to the dire living conditions, detainees say they're not provided any programming, recreation time, or entertainment like board games, radio, or television.

"We take bread and make chess pieces out of bread," said Caleb. "There's nothing to do in here."

Detainees say they often battle hunger because of meager portions and poor food.

"The guys that don't have family sending money, they in trouble," said Caleb. "They're going to bed hungry. We give them what we can, but guys go to bed hungry in here every night."

The food the jail provides sits for hours before it's served, he said.

"We always eat cold," Caleb said. "We haven't had a hot meal since I've been here."

Caleb, who is a practicing Muslim, is approaching his fourth Ramadan at the jail, he said. In previous years, they were not fed until 10 or 11 at night even though they were

"Sometimes we can actually see the food sitting outside," he said. "They just don't pass it out to us because the deputy is sitting in the booth and he has to wait till help come so he can come out of the booth and pass food out."

Jane and Judy said the women are also sometimes served food that has been sitting out for several hours. They're provided breakfast typically between 3 and 4:30 a.m. The jail then provides lunch and dinner together—a tray of food for lunch, and a sack containing two sandwiches and two cookies for dinner, according to Jane.

People in the mental health unit are not allowed to use the commissary, so they can't buy items to supplement the jail's meals, said Jeff, who is housed in the unit, along with David and Peter.

"Sometimes you don't get enough to fill you up," Jeff said. "You got people in here fighting over food."

Jeff said he's gone weeks without any utensils, and learned to make a spoon from a paper plate by watching another detainee. On the women's side, new detainees are not given utensils and have to eat with their hands or use a piece of styrofoam plate as a utensil, according to Judy.

The jail's food services provider—Trinity Services Group—has no apparent [financial incentive](#) to provide detainees with better meals. Both Trinity and [Access Securepak](#), which [runs the jail's commissary](#), are part of the same subsidiary company, which is owned by private equity firm [HIG Capital](#). More purchases of heavily marked-up food items from the commissary only mean more profits. Detainees pay more than \$4 for about four ounces of tuna. A "supreme pizza" and chips runs over \$12. One ramen package is \$1.11.

Trinity Services Group has been repeatedly [accused](#) of serving incarcerated people inedible food. In 2016, Michigan prisoners [protested](#) over Trinity's food, and state officials later fined the company [more than \\$2 million](#) for several violations.

With early voting already underway in [next week's election](#), new leadership could soon be coming to the Clayton County Jail.

While former Sheriff Victor Hill has enthusiastically [endorsed](#) his godson, Levon Allen, some of the candidates have distanced themselves from Hill. Candidate Clarence Cox told The Appeal in an email that Hill had damaged the reputation of the sheriff's office and that "the bad surely outweighed the good."

Terry Evans, who's also running to be the next sheriff, said in a statement to The Appeal that he is "the only candidate who worked under [Hill] that reported his actions to the Commissioners of Clayton County along with the Legal Department." In 2021, Evans [accused Hill of firing him](#) for speaking out against unsafe conditions in the jail.

No matter who wins the election, the conditions at the jail are so dire that they may warrant federal intervention. Georgia-based civil rights attorney Isaac Tekie told The Appeal. He said the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division should commence an investigation into the jail. "This is what the institution is built for," he said.

The Department of Justice declined to comment when contacted by The Appeal.

Federal investigations are [notoriously slow](#), however. In the meantime, local leaders must take more immediate steps to address conditions at the jail, said Whitney Knox Lee, a staff attorney with the Southern Center for Human Rights, a civil rights law firm that has [previously sued](#) Hill over jail practices. She argued that officials should take swift action to make necessary repairs and provide programming for detainees.

The Clayton County Board of Commissioners is ultimately responsible for funding operations and repairs at the jail, said Lee.

The commissioners' public discussions about repairs echo much of what the detainees reported to The Appeal about safety and plumbing issues. At a meeting in September, the board removed an agenda item to appropriate more than \$2 million to repair locks at the jail because county officials said they were still working through logistics. Two commissioners opposed removing the item, with one stating that the locks issue was an emergency. The next month, the commissioners [approved](#) a request for \$120,000 to replace locks and hinges at the sheriff's office. All four men who spoke with The Appeal reported that the locks at the jail were broken. "If anybody wants to do anything to you while you asleep, they can," said David.

In February, the board [voted to provide the county's Buildings and Maintenance Department](#) with more than \$3 million for emergency repairs at the jail. While details of specific repairs were not disclosed at the commissioners' meeting, there was some discussion about broken toilets at the jail.

To address the human rights crisis in the jail, the population should also be reduced, Lee argued, noting that most people at the jail are pretrial detainees.

"The purpose of jail is not punishment, rather it serves as a mechanism to ensure an accused person appears in court," Lee said in an email. She suggested some were "being held there for no other reason than that they are poor."

As of Feb. 17, there were just [over 1,700 detainees](#) housed at the jail, according to a population report provided by the sheriff's office. Almost 80 percent of all detainees were Black. Of the more than 1,300 pretrial detainees, 318 were charged only with misdemeanors.

"We're not animals," said Peter. "It's already bad enough being in here. You shouldn't just rub it in someone's face and just actually treat 'em like crap. You wouldn't want that done to you."

**TAGGED:** Buildings and Maintenance, Clarence Cox, Isaac Tekie, Justice Department, Levon Allen, SCHR, Terry Evans, Victor Hill, Whitney Knox Lee

**Leave a comment**

*You must be logged in to post a comment.*



© 2023 The Clayton Crescent. Proudly powered by Newspack by Automattic

